

Washington, DC – Today, Rep. Tim Walz (Minnesota-01), Sen. John Boozman (Arkansas), Sen. Mark Begich (Alaska), and Rep. Gus Bilirakis (Florida-09) introduced bipartisan legislation to improve rehabilitation services for veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury (TBI).

Because of ambiguities in current law, TBI treatment at the Department of Veterans Affairs narrowly focuses TBI care on physical restoration. The Veterans' Traumatic Brain Injury Rehabilitative Services' Improvements Act of 2011 would clarify the definition of rehabilitation so veterans will receive care that adequately addresses their physical and mental health needs, as well as quality of life and prospects for long-term recovery and success.

"Our wounded warriors deserve the best care and support we can give them," said Rep. Tim Walz, who is a 24 year veteran of the Army National Guard. "When a veteran suffering from TBI comes to the VA for treatment, they need to be presented with a comprehensive approach to rehabilitation that will allow them to recover function, achieve independence and fully integrate back into their communities. This bill ensures we provide comprehensive care instead of just physical rehabilitation, which is what is presently available to our injured veterans."

Because of advances in medicine, service members who would not have been expected to survive catastrophic attacks in previous conflicts are returning home today from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan with unprecedented severe and complex injuries. Since 2001, over 1,500 service members have suffered from a severe TBI, many of whom require rehabilitative programs ranging from total care for the most basic needs to semi-independent living support. A restrictive approach to rehabilitation puts these wounded warriors at risk of losing any progress they made towards recovery.

"We have an obligation to the men and women who serve and sacrifice on behalf of our grateful nation. Providing the best services to our troops who have sustained a traumatic brain injury is part of our commitment to ensure our military personnel get the care they deserve," Boozman said.

"The sacrifices made by America's wounded warriors should never go overlooked," said Sen. Begich. "Treating traumatic brain injury requires a comprehensive approach that goes further than physical restoration. This legislation takes the critical and overdue step of empowering the VA to fully care for our wounded warriors and the invisible scars of war. Let's get this bill passed

and serve our veterans with the same respect they served our country."

"Our wounded warriors have made tremendous sacrifices in order to keep this country safe, and it is our responsibility to help them wherever we have the ability to do so," said Rep. Gus Bilirakis, Vice Chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. "With nearly 2 million veterans calling Florida home, I often hear about the need for legislation to ensure they receive the care they deserve. Providing our veterans and service members with the proper care is the least we can do to repay them for their service."

Currently, this legislation is endorsed by the Wounded Warrior Project and the Blinded Veterans Association.

"These complex injuries often require long-term rehabilitative care," said Wounded Warrior Project Executive Director Steve Nardizzi. "The legislation would help ensure that needed rehabilitation is not prematurely cut off, and that these veterans can get the support they need – whether those are health-services or non-medical assistance -- to achieve maximum independence and quality of life."

The Veterans' Traumatic Brain Injury Rehabilitative Services Improvements Act of 2011 would ensure wounded warriors suffering from TBI receive a more comprehensive and holistic rehabilitation plan that focuses on physical restoration, mental health, independence, and quality of life. It would also help veterans in maintaining the gains they have made during initial phases of treatment by requiring the Department of Veterans' Affairs to develop rehabilitation plans that stress improved physical, cognitive and vocational functioning in the long term.